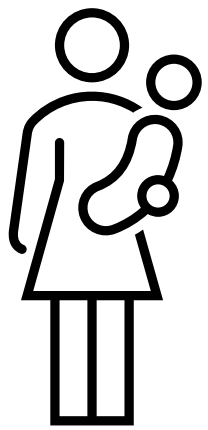
Never Change:
what worthless advice -- here is a perzine about how becoming a parent changed me, but it's also social commentary (probably critique)



February 2024

Murphyao Ink

Once upon a time, I didn't even have a cell phone. I am that old. I'd use my land line or email to make plans and then I just had to ... show up to where I said I'd be when I said I'd be there. Most people still barely had flip phones, so this was generally considered socially acceptable behavior (with a general level of tolerance for Missed Connections, etc.). Now, many of us can enjoy sending the classic text message that Michael sends while eating take out on his couch in the season finale of *The Good Place*:

For a long time, I lived in Chicago or other grid-cities that weren't too big or complicated, or I lived there long enough to figure it out, or I printed out MapQuest directions to take with me, or I asked the bus driver. Scratch that – for a long time, I didn't even have a driver's license. I did mess up on transit a few times, but you really only need to do that twice to figure out that you never want to do it again. Anyhow, on the rare-ish occasions that I did get mislocate, I'd usually call my friend Britt or my boyfriend and ask them to use their work computer to look up directions for me that then read them to me over the phone. (By this point, I had a flip phone after all!)

Needless to say, this got a bit tiresome for them. So when I was living in a Brand New (to me) city and expecting Baby #1, baby daddy was like, hey, it is probably not long-term feasible for you to keep calling for directions, because Britt lives in another time zone and I have meetings at work and you are going to have a baby, so just get a smart phone with map capabilities for emergencies. Ever since then (approximately 9 years ago), I have had a smart phone. I gotta say, I don't love it, but it has come in pretty handy for things like museum tickets, navigation, and texting friends. It has come in less handy for wasting my time on apps but maybe that's a personal problem.

Would I eventually have gotten a smart phone and a driver's license and a car without becoming a parent? Maybe. But maybe not. I am very stubborn. And a luddite / proud owner of five typewriters at last count (see the January 2022 zine for more on that topic). And I still have a landline. And I don't really know how to change my ringtone (which I guess was a reason to have kids – they change it for me... but that's a real chicken-and-egg issue, isn't it?). Has anything else changed about me as I became a parent? Absolutely not. (This is sarcasm.) I am probably a completely different person than I was 10 years ago – but the car and phone thing really stick out.

In any case, maybe I would have wound up with a “smart” phone without kids, but I very likely would not have wound up with a big red van purchased through [a Specific Members-Only Warehouse] if there wasn’t a need to fit two ginormous convertible car seats in a vehicle (and a misguided desire to go camping with said children, a symptom that persists to this day). Driving sucks and everyone is a maniac, but as a chauffeur to two tiny humans, the big red van is my second home (with instant coffee & other emergency provisions loaded up in the back, ketchup packets—open & unopened—strewn about the backseat, and all the other detritus of kids).

Sometimes people say that they were never better parents than before they had kids. (The sentiment has made it into a *Baby Blues* strip as well as various internet memes.) I wonder if driving a van and using a smart phone are cultural touchstones that have made me a better or worse parent, and I also wonder if either of those things contribute to making me a better or worse person (in terms of exploitation in mining for elements to build my fancy electronic pocket computer, as well as the use of fossil fuels in my vehicle,
à la *The Good Place* calculus,
which I am leaving here as shorthand for the many philosophical stances discussed in the show).

There are plenty of other quotidian changes to my life since becoming a parent, but the two that really bother me the most are smart phone ownership / usage and driving an internal combustion engine around. They strike me as particularly Suburban American Tokens of Parenthood. I know people parent without one, the other, or either of these items. But they enable a lot of the daily activities that the kids (and I) do, so until I get to sell the van, rent out my parking spot, and ditch my smart phone for a landline without an answering machine (* gasp *), this is the way I am parenting for now – driving to remote campsites and a forest school with poor cell reception!